

IN THE CLAIMS:

The text of all pending claims, (including withdrawn claims) is set forth below. Cancelled and not entered claims are indicated with claim number and status only. The claims as listed below show added text with underlining and deleted text with ~~strikethrough~~. The status of each claim is indicated with one of (original), (currently amended), (cancelled), (withdrawn), (new), (previously presented), or (not entered).

Please CANCEL claims 17-19 in accordance with the following:

1. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) A communications intermediating method for mediating communications user terminals carry out sharing at least one virtual space on a network, via an intermediating terminal, the communications intermediating method, comprising:

- storing, in a user terminal, a preference table in which at least one network resource symbol and predetermined preference data are correlated, the preference data including positional information of the symbol to be displayed on the user terminal and indicating a level of similarity in preference of a user towards the symbol;
- storing, in the intermediating terminal, a correspondence table in which identifiers for virtual spaces, identifiers for symbols and levels of similarity in preference of users towards the symbols are correlated;
- sending an identifier for the symbol and the preference data indicating the level of similarity in preference from the user terminal to the intermediating terminal;
- computing, in the intermediating terminal, a level of similarity in user preference based on the preference data received from the user terminal, and notifying to the user terminal a virtual space identifier corresponding to the received symbol identifier and the computed level of similarity in user preference based on the correspondence table;
- wherein based on a reported virtual-space identifier the user terminal participates in the virtual space and initiates communication with at least one other user terminal having the same symbol.

2. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) An intermediating device for mediating communications among user terminals on a network, the intermediating device including:

- a correspondence table in which identifiers for virtual spaces, identifiers for symbols, and levels of similarity in preference of users towards the symbols are correlated;

a first reception unit capable of receiving the symbol identifiers and the preference data indicating the level of similarity of preferences from the user terminals;

a calculating unit capable of calculating a level of similarity in user preference based on the preference data received from the user terminal; and

a first transmission unit capable of transmitting to the user terminals a virtual space identifier corresponding to the received symbol identifier and the computed level of similarity in user preference based on the correspondence table.

3. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The intermediating device set forth in claim 2, wherein:
said correspondence table correlatively stores the virtual-space identifiers, the symbol identifiers, and interest levels in the symbols;

said first reception unit capable of receiving from the user terminals the symbol identifiers and the interest levels; and

said first transmission unit capable of transmitting to the user terminals the virtual-space identifiers that based on said correspondence table correspond to the received symbol identifiers and to the received interest levels in combination.

4. (CANCELLED)

5. (CANCELLED)

6. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) A computer-readable recording medium on which is recorded a communications program for use by user terminals on a network, the computer-readable recording medium characterized by including a program configured for:

storing, in a user terminal, a preference table in which at least one network resource symbol and predetermined preference data are correlated, the preference data including positional information of the symbol to be displayed on the user terminal and indicating a level of similarity in preference of a user towards the symbol;

a step of acquiring via a network, and selectably displaying, network resource symbols;

a step of transmitting to an intermediating device identifiers for user-selected network resource symbols;

a step of receiving identifiers for virtual spaces that correspond to symbol identifiers transmitted based on a correspondence table in the intermediating device correlatively storing in

advance network resource symbols with virtual spaces;

sending an identifier for the symbol and the preference data indicating the level of similarity in preference from the user terminal to the intermediating terminal;

a step of connecting to a given virtual space based on identifiers in received virtual spaces, and initiating chat.

7. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) A merchandise information exchange support method characterized by:

preparing a correspondence table in which merchandise and virtual chat spaces for exchanging information on the merchandise are correlated in advance;

storing, in an intermediating terminal, said correspondence table in which identifiers for virtual spaces, identifiers for symbols and levels of similarity in preference of users towards the symbols are correlated;

storing, in a user terminal, a preference table in which at least one network resource symbol and predetermined preference data are correlated, the preference data including positional information of the symbol to be displayed on the user terminal and indicating a level of similarity in preference of a user towards the symbol;

sending an identifier for the symbol and the preference data indicating the level of similarity in preference from the user terminal to the intermediating terminal;

computing, in the intermediating terminal, a level of similarity in preference based on the preference data received from the user terminal, and notifying to the user terminal a virtual space identifier corresponding to the received symbol identifier and the computed level of similarity in preference based on the correspondence table

presenting to user terminals, via a network, symbols prepared per merchandise item in order to display the merchandise identifiably;

identifying merchandise symbols selected in user terminals;

acquiring and reporting to the user terminals information for identifying virtual chat spaces correlated based on the correspondence table to given merchandise; and

enabling in a one user terminal exchange of information on the given merchandise with other user terminals to begin.

8. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) A communications intermediating method for mediating communications among user terminals on a network, the communications intermediating

method, comprising:

- storing, in an intermediating terminal, a correspondence table in which identifiers for virtual spaces, identifiers for symbols and levels of similarity in preference of users towards the symbols are correlated; and

- computing, in the intermediating terminal, a level of similarity in preference based on the preference data received from the user terminal, and notifying to the user terminal a virtual space identifier corresponding to the received symbol identifier and the computed level of similarity in preference based on the correspondence table.

9. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) A computer-readable recording medium on which is recorded a communications intermediating program for mediating communications among user terminals on a network, the computer-readable recording medium on which is recorded a communications intermediating program for executing:

- a step of selectably displaying on user terminals network resource symbols;

- storing, in an intermediating terminal, a correspondence table in which identifiers for virtual spaces, identifiers for symbols and levels of similarity in preference of users towards the symbols are correlated;

- a step of receiving identifiers for network resources selected in response to operations on the user terminals a step of acquiring virtual-space identifiers correlated to received network resource symbol identifiers based on a correspondence table made by correlatively storing in advance symbol identifiers with identifiers for virtual spaces;

- a step of transmitting the acquired virtual-space identifiers to the user terminals; and

- computing, in the intermediating terminal, a level of similarity in preference based on the preference data received from the user terminal, and notifying the user terminal of a virtual space identifier corresponding to the received symbols identifier and the computed level of similarity in preferences based on the correspondence table.

10. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) A communications method for use by a user terminal on a network, the communications method comprising:

- acquiring network resource symbols;

- storing, in a user terminal, a preference table in which at least one network resource symbol and predetermined preference data are correlated, the preference data including positional information of the symbol to be displayed on the user terminal and indicating a level of

similarity in preference of a user towards the symbol;

sending an identifier for the symbol and the preference data including the level of similarity in preferences from the user terminal to the intermediating terminal;

receiving from the information terminal virtual-space identifiers corresponding to the symbols;

participating, based on the virtual-space identifiers, in the virtual spaces and initiating communication with other user terminals having same symbols.

11. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) A communications device for communicating on a network, the communications device comprising:

acquisition unit capable of acquiring network resource symbols;

storing unit capable of storing, in a user terminal, a preference table in which at least one network resource symbol and predetermined preference data are correlated, the preference data including positional information of the symbol to be displayed on the user terminal and indicating a level of similarity in preference of a user towards the symbol;

communication unit capable of participating in virtual spaces on the network to carry out communications with other communications devices;

a second transmission unit capable of transmitting symbol identifiers to a predetermined information terminal enabling conversion between virtual-space identifiers and the symbol identifiers;

a second reception unit capable of receiving from the information terminal the virtual-space identifiers that correspond to the symbols;

a sending unit capable of sending an identifier for the symbol and the preference data indicating the level of similarity in preference from the user terminal to the intermediating terminal; and

connection unit capable of initiating, based on the virtual-space identifiers, communication with other communications devices having the same symbols.

12. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) The communications device of claim 11, further comprising a preference table in which symbols acquired by the communications device of claim 11 and level of interest in the symbols are correlatively stored;

wherein said second transmission unit capable of transmitting to the predetermined information terminal the symbol identifiers and the level of interest.

13. (CANCELLED)

14. (CANCELLED)

15. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) A merchandise presentation method cooperating with a chat system to enable exchange of messages mutually among multiple user terminals sharing virtual spaces structured on a network, the merchandise presentation method comprising:

selectably presenting to a user terminal a symbol prepared for each merchandise to identifiably display the merchandise via a network;

storing, in a user terminal, a preference table in which at least one network resource symbol and predetermined preference data are correlated, the preference data including positional information of the symbol to be displayed on the user terminal and indicating a level of similarity in preference of a user towards the symbol;

storing, in the intermediating terminal, a correspondence table in which identifiers for virtual spaces, identifiers for symbols and levels of similarity in preference of users towards the symbols are correlated;

sending an identifier for the symbol and the preference data indicating the level of similarity in preference from the user terminal to the intermediating terminal;

computing, in the intermediating terminal, a level of similarity in preference based on the preference data received from the user terminal, and notifying to the user terminal a virtual space identifier corresponding to the received symbol identifier and the computed level of similarity in preference based on the correspondence table;

obtaining and sending to a user terminal an identifier of a virtual chat space, which correlates to an identifier of a symbol and then stored when receiving an identifier of a symbol reported according to user selection; and

connecting the user terminal to the virtual chat space to start to exchange messages with other user terminals.

16. (PREVIOUSLY PRESENTED) A communications support method, characterized by:
storing, in a user terminal, a preference table in which at least one network resource symbol and predetermined preference data are correlated, the preference data including positional information of the symbol to be displayed on the user terminal and indicating a level of

similarity in preference of a user towards the symbol;

storing, in the intermediating terminal, a correspondence table in which identifiers for virtual spaces, identifiers for symbols and levels of similarity in preference of users towards the symbols are correlated;

sending an identifier for the symbol and the preference data indicating the level of similarity in preference from the user terminal to the intermediating terminal;

computing, in the intermediating terminal, a level of similarity in preference based on the preference data received from the user terminal, and notifying to the user terminal a virtual space identifier corresponding to the received symbol identifier and the computed level of similarity in preference based on the correspondence table;

preparing for each merchandise a chat space on a network which invites users interested in relevant merchandise and a correspondence table where merchandise and a chat space corresponding said merchandise are correlatively stored;

selectably presenting to a user terminal a symbol prepared for each merchandise to identifiably display said merchandise via a network;

identifying a symbol of merchandise selected by a user terminal; and

obtaining information for identifying a virtual chat space correlated to relevant merchandise according to said correspondence table to issue a command for inviting relevant user terminal to relevant virtual chat space and starting communication between users having common interest in merchandise.

17-19. (cancelled)